

Why Prioritize Early Childhood?

- *The Science and Benefits of Positive Early Childhood Experiences*
- *Economic Mobility*
- *Child and Family Stability and Well-Being Health and Behavioral Health*
- *A Whole Family Approach*

The Science and Benefits of Positive Early Childhood Experiences

A strong body of evidence demonstrates the numerous benefits of investing in high-quality early learning and care experiences that nurture children's healthy physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development.

- *The evidence clearly shows that children who grow up in high-quality, developmentally appropriate early learning environments are more likely to be ready for school, have higher high school graduation and employment rates, and improved health and behavioral outcomes (Heckman, 2017; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010).*
- *The return on investment of two targeted, high-quality early childhood programs found that these programs had a 13 percent return on investment per child, per year through improved education, economic, health, and social outcomes (Garcia, Heckman, Leaf, & Prados, 2017).*
- *Another study found that across all program types, including large public pre-K programs, the cost-benefit ratio of ECE is closer to \$3 to \$4 for every \$1 invested in early childhood programs (Karoly, 2016; Committee for Economic Development, 2019; Morrissey, 2017; Sabol & Chase-Lansdale, 2015).*
- *Other research on evidence-based home visiting found that it can be cost-effective in the long term, with the largest benefits coming through reduced spending on government programs and increased individual earnings (Michalopoulos, C, et. al. 2017).*

Economic Mobility

- *When parents have access to child care supports, they are more likely to enter or remain in the workforce, work more hours, increase earnings, and pursue higher education or training (Committee for Economic Development, 2019; Morrissey, 2017; Sabol & Chase-Lansdale, 2015).*
- *Parents of children attending Head Start showed increases in their educational attainment over time (Sabol & Chase-Lansdale, 2015).*
- *Parents whose children attended Early Head Start were found to have several positive benefits from the program such as increased participation in education, job training programs, and employment (Love et al., 2002). This research also showed positive impacts on parenting outcomes, including parents providing more support for children's emotional, cognitive, and language development and parents being less likely to use punitive discipline strategies.*

- Another study found that increased child care subsidy expenditures positively impacted labor force participation and employment rates of low-income mothers in the United States (Burgess, Chien, & Ench1autegui, 2016).
- The child care cliff is also a widely recognized problem that creates barriers for working parents living just above the poverty line, and the Administration has encouraged states to strengthen policies to address the sudden loss of child care assistance due to a wage increase or acceptance of a higher paying job.¹

Child and Family Stability and Well-Being

High-quality early care and learning programs, including public pre-kindergarten, Head Start, and Early Head Start, have a positive impact on a variety of child and family outcomes.

- Specifically, high-quality early learning programs have been associated with positive impacts on children's cognitive development, language, literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills in preschool (Camili, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2010; Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Gormley, Phillips, & Gayer, 2008; Gormley, Phillips, Welte, Newmark, & Adelstein, 2011; Lipsey, Hofer, Dong, Farran, & Bilbrey, 2013; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2010; Yoshikawa et al., 2013).
- Infants and toddlers who attended Early Head Start showed positive impacts on their cognitive, language, and social-emotional development at age 3 (Love et al., 2002).
- High-quality early learning and care is particularly beneficial for certain disadvantaged and ethnic minority children. A large body of research suggests that children from low-income families, children from certain ethnic-minority backgrounds, and English language learners show even greater gains in language, literacy, math, and cognitive skills compared to their peers (Gormley et al., 2008; Karoly & Auger, 2016; Lipsey et al., 2013; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013; Yoshikawa et al., 2013).
- In addition to short-term effects, high-quality early care and learning has been shown to have long-term effects on important life outcomes. The Perry Preschool program, Chicago Child-Parent Center Education Program, and Abecedarian project, have shown positive effects on later academic achievement, high school graduation rates, earnings in adulthood, and reductions in grade retention, criminal activity, and substance abuse (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Campbell et al., 2012; Heckman et al., 2010; Reynolds et al., 2011; Schweinhart, Barnett, & Belfield, 2005).
- A robust body of research has shown that home visits by a nurse, social worker, early childhood educator, or other trained professional during pregnancy and early childhood improve the lives of children and families. Home visiting helps prevent child abuse and neglect, supports positive parenting, improves maternal and child health, and promotes child development and school readiness (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, HomeVEE, 2019).
- Children who attended Early Head Start were found to have fewer child welfare encounters and were less likely to have a substantiated report of physical or sexual

¹ White House Principles for Child Care Reform: Increasing Access to Affordable, High Quality Child Care in America (see footnote 6).

abuse than children in the control group (Green et al., 2014). Other research suggests that Head Start has positive long-term effects on children's outcomes (Carniero & Ginja, 2014; Deming, 2009; Garces, Thomas, & Currie, 2002; Ludwig & Miller, 2007; Ludwig & Phillips, 2008) including intergenerational effects with the potential to disrupt cycles of poverty (Barr & Gibbs, 2017).

- *There is emerging evidence on the potential of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) child care subsidies to positively affect children's longer-term school performance, such as improved grade retention, lower school absence in middle school, and increases in third grade reading and math scores (Zanoni & Johnson, 2019; Shattuck, 2017).*

Health and Behavioral Health

Participation in early learning and care programs can have positive impacts on children's overall health, which encompasses their physical, oral, developmental, social, emotional, and behavioral health (U.S. Department of Health [HHS] and the U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2017).

- *Research conducted in Head Start has linked children's attendance to long-term health impacts, such as reduced incidence of behavioral problems and reduced likelihood of smoking (Anderson, Foster, & Frisvold, 2010; Carneiro & Ginja, 2014). Additionally, children's participation in other programs, such as the Chicago Child Parent Center, has been linked to lower rates of substance abuse more than 25 years later (Reynolds, Temple, Ou, Arteaga, & White, 2011).*
- *Children growing up in adverse circumstances face increased risk of experiencing a prolonged activation of their stress systems. This experience, often referred to as toxic stress, can have repercussions for both physical and mental health (Shonkoff et al., 2012). These risks underscore the importance of early intervention through supportive education, health, and other comprehensive services.*
- *Early Head Start and home visiting programs have played a leading role in developing innovative approaches to combat toxic stress early in development (Berlin et al., 2013; Garner, 2013; Minkovitz, O'Neill, & Duggan, 2016; Shonkoff, 2016).*

A Whole Family Approach

A whole family approach intentionally recognizes the needs of children and their parents together to better align systems and programs that serve them. Prioritizing early childhood development necessitates a whole family approach (a.k.a. two-generation, two-gen, multi-generation), which also includes meaningful father engagement and working with families that are experiencing homelessness. This whole family approach can include:

- *Promoting linkages between high-quality early care and education for children and workforce development services for their parents;*
- *Ensuring families have access to economic and social supports needed for stability and resilience and healthy child development; and*

- *Helping families build social capital that can support both resilience and economic mobility.*

There is exciting work already underway and many state and local communities are implementing whole family strategies that prioritize early childhood development (Sama-Miller & Baumgartner, 2017; White, Mosle & Sims, 2018).